

Poetry Across the Years

The School Years

Commuters

Ten men. Ten papers.
Ten men. Wiping their glasses.
Ten black briefcases
Sit beneath ten pin-striped knees-
Uniformly uniform.

Written on the 08.07 train from Woking-Weybridge, travelling to school

On a Bridge

On a bridge
Walking up,
Nearly in the middle
But not quite,
Yet still.

Slowly, so slowly-
Nothing happens.
Yet light is there,
A strong beam, a single beam
Of pure white
Its tributaries reaching out to me;
A beam of faces
Familiar and warm.

It is cold though.
I am cold and cannot move.
The warmth of the light grows inside me;

I almost move-
I can see the other side of the bridge,
A place alien and unknown,
Yet I have been here before.

But this is not enough,
I cannot move,
And will not-
Unless I can be sure.
It is dark, yet
The light is there;
So nearly my foot moves forwards,
So solid is it in its place.

Sky

Thick and grey at the bottom.
Muggy.
Cotton wool surrounding the town.
Grey cotton wool.
Thick grey cotton wool.
Can you reach higher?
Can you reach through?
We can see the sky above, pure blue,
But are you looking?

Noises from the town
Are muffled in the cotton wool.
Yet thrown back at every person
Who will take them.
We can hear the silence above, in the blue,
But are you listening?
Can you reach?
Do you want to?

Dreams of Childhood

Shhh...

'Goodnight, God bless, muh pwuh'.
Sindy dolls in a gold and cream wardrobe house.
Gold chips- can it really be gold rain?
Oh yes!
Daddy.
A play tent. Birthday party. My rollerboots don't fit.
A typewriter. Look, I can do backwards stitch and pearl!
Magic Sand.
Fishfingers and chips.
I love you.
A climbing frame outside the window. New. Pretending
Not to see it.
Jumping into the snow from the climbing frame.
Jumping from the very top.
If you work hard enough you can do it.
Never giving up.
Playing 'Raffles' at Send First; I'm in charge.
No, I didn't say anything (no, it was
Only at the moment)
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1...
And so long ago, I'm a toddler
Looking up,
Ketchup flying
Up
On the ceiling
Knowing, while Grandad was shaking the bottle,
What was going to happen.
Anticipating-
Yes of course,
All over the ceiling,
Everyone else smiling now.
Grandad.
How I miss you.
Dreams of childhood.

Ode to a Drawing Pin

This is not
An ode to you, Drawing Pin,

Because I do not
Like you. You
Are vicious and
Evil, daring to sit
On the very spot upon which
My knee decided to
Descend.
You have a protruding
Spike sticking out from
You and I do not like
That either. Especially when
It's in my leg.
Do I look like a pin board,
Or a piece of paper, I
Ask you?
Admit it, pin-features, your
Uses are elsewhere. To
Draw blood from me then
Cause me to hop
Unnaturally around the house
On one leg like a small one-legged
Parrot is surely
Not on. Even if I did
Put you on the floor in the
First place you could have
Moved. But no. You had to be
Stubborn and remain there
Lying in wait for my
Leg like Tom lying in wait for
Jerry in that cartoon I
Didn't get to see the other
Day because I had to do my homework
Instead. And that was your fault
Too.
O Drawing Pin, Your Sharpness, I am forever indebted to your
Spike. In fact I think I may never
Kneel again. Still, I dedicate this poem to
You, even though I do not
Like you.

The Waitrose Years (1990-1992)

Ode no. 1 to Till

O Till, I like you
A lot. You are so handsome
And fine, so muscular
Yet till-like...

Ode no. 2 to Till

O Till, you are so fine,
You remind me of a bottle of wine,
Why this is I do not know...

Ode no. 3 to Till

It is impossible to write
An ode to a till.

Ode to Chris

There once was a prat named Chris.
Who was continually taking the piss,
'Till one day he jumped
On his skis and went bump,
And now he's hurt his finger.

Ode to Sarah

There once lived a girlie called Sarah
Who smelt so much no-one could bear her,
Then one day she killed
Whilst cleaning the tills
A small beetle that was trying to eat its lunch at the time.

Ode to Jenny

There once lived a flirter called Jenny
Who wasn't worth more than a penny,
She had but one friend
And that was her pen,
For even the Zion didn't like her.

Ode to Carol (The Scots one)

There once was a wee bairn named Carol
Who was made in the shape of a barrel,
She wore a wee kilt,
Ate haggis and milk
Until she went pop in the middle of the shop floor.

Ode to Ella

There once lived a young girl called Ella,
Wherever she went you could smell her,
One day the pong
Was more than just strong,
But no-one decided to tell her that she also looked like an elephant.

To Janine

Janine, Janine-
Nobody likes you.

To Janine no.2

Even though you think they do.

To Janine no.3

And I'm not taken in by your fake smile either.

To Janine no.4

And I'm not scared of you.

To Janine no.5

Even though you don't like me.

To Janine no.6

And that's only because I've got half a brain and you're jealous.

To Janine no.7

And because I went out with Matt, who you would give your right earlobe to
For a rendez-vous in the medical room.

To Janine no.8

And he doesn't like you either; he just creeps.

To Janine no. 9

(And you have stumpy legs and think they're sexy)

Thoughts on sitting in the car park kiosk

Yes, well, I can think of better things to do.

And worse.

Yes.

It's cold.

But the radiator is quite hot

Which means that my right leg is hot

And the rest of me is not.

Ah.

Every so often a car appears

Which means I have to take the little white ticket

And put it into the clock's metal mouth

Which eats it and scares my hand.
The intellectual implications of this task are great.
Sometimes I get some money.
The till eats this though.
Why does everything around here get to eat, and I don't?

Sometimes, naughty people drive through without paying,
Thinking that they're really clever.
Yes, I suppose it is quite clever.
But all I can do is sit there and call them a 'tart',
Feeling annoyed because the little white card which should be mine
Is in fact in their car
And not me or the mouth of the clock.

It's foggy. Foggy woggy.
But I'm in the kiosk,
All safe and warm and far away from anyone
But myself.

Little children are arriving for the Christmas party.
Bet they're thrilled.
Do they want to?
Do they know?

That machine is getting on my nerves.
It's so naughty. And vicious.
In fact, I don't like it. Much.
Ding dong merrily on high,
In heaven the bells are ringing.
But in the kiosk the horrid punching machine is making a horrid punching noise
And only when it feels like it.

It's five past three.
How time flies when you're having so much fun.
(And when the clock is staring at you squarely in the face (and that's a pun)).

Ten to five.
I look suspiciously at the clock.
It keeps making funny noises:
Tick, tock, click every minute or so

Or at some other equally-suspect interval.
The look I give the clock is so suspicious and so suspect
That the next three cars pass by me without arising suspicion.

One out of four concerned customers asks me
(thinking either 'poor little lamb' or 'I'm bloody glad it's not me')
If I'm freezing to death or not.
To the former category I reveal the presence of the big fat radiator
At my side.
To the latter, I assert that I am indeed freezing to death,
And that my last hours will be spent in this holy kiosk.
O kiosk, where would I be without you?
Sitting on my bottom in the middle of a cold car park.
Point.
I am suddenly inspired to write a poem entitled 'Ode to Kiosk'.
However this feeling runs away as fleetingly as its stay.

I wave at children sitting in the backs of cars,
And they wave back, surprised and happy-
For them it is a link with the outside world
Not initiated by their parental figures
But by a stranger, myself,
Who knows not what they are
Yet acknowledges them as being.

The American Year (1992-1993)

1 December 1992

and here i am in my nice warm pyjamas
With even my feet covered up so nothing can get
In. Where is everybody? I should not want,
Yet an impatience within me wants to be held,
To be safe, yet that is not in the plan yet.
So much to learn
and here i am cuddled up on my bed
Safe in the womb of duvet covers,
The wall not quite ready to crumble.
Believe.

Yet so strong a belief still feeds on Mama's milk.

Monday, 10 May 1993

April-
The calendar should be turned to May
And suddenly it's summer.
Thrown in
Unsure
I curl up in foetal position
And realise how old I am,
How young I was
There is no such thing as past,
Only in thought and belief
It exists;
Hazy images dotted with
Real flashes of remembrance as
Sharp as
Glass
In your mind.
Did I remember?
Dreams of childhood.
Already facing adult fears, worries, temptations-
Can I win?
Can I survive, try and
Please, can I continue to see?
I don't want to enter the cloud,
Yet I must, I must learn and
Reach through the thick swirls
To blue oblivion
Where happiness lay.
I see the journey.
And the calendar of my life turns a
Silent page every day.
How, if there is no such thing as time?

Unfinished poem written at the Washington Monument, in line, 26 May

And slowly-
I wish to write a peaceful poem
And be as insignificant as I can
Right here where all these people
Think they are.
Don't they stop and
Close their eyes
And feel the sunlight on their neck
And wind blowing their hair
And gently teasing their legs
To remind they who do not listen that-
It is not forceful.
It does not impose.

If we removed
All these buildings and
Cars and jewellery and clothes
We would be left with a
Paradise, a
Garden of Eden
Where trees and grass and
Leaves and little flies and ants
(and people) may
Be.
But even in the garden,
The tree...

June 28 1993, Ocean City

Child of passions
She runs
Unleashed
Through the soft sand
Up the hill
Down again and
Thud.
She stops
Silenced by the newness of the scene
She drinks.

First the sky
A perfect hemisphere
That nothing can touch,
Deep dark blue
In its simplicity.
Now
She walks
Immersed in the scene
Yet an outsider to all,
Observing.
The sea is new,
Part of nature that moves,
Is active,
Does not keep still,
Strong in its reign.
She knows the familiar grounds
Of grasses, of moors, where time stops,
Of a spot on the ground by a river
Where a small ray of sunlight
Quietly spreads its warmth,
Asking nothing.
And here, the ocean...
She walks on,
Turns
It is right
The other people
A faded image,
Not quite real,
Part of the landscape,
Sand-carved figures.
Then
She stops.
Each star
A dot
So tiny,
Insignificant to most,
Pretty.
Yet what is really happening
So far away
We can only guess at,

Each one a sun,
The sun just one.
Child of passions.

The Black Hills of South Dakota/Mount Rushmore (29.7.93)

Thomas, it is here where
Your holiday home is
In these black hills which are more
Green.
Yes I guess that from a distance
They look black
Which is no doubt where they get their name from
And more important I suppose
If you're into that kind of thing,
Which I am
Not.
How can a tree be called black?
Get close to each one, and stand
In awe of each deep, dark green
Branch, for it is you who are
Black.
Anyway enough of this (blackness)
For there you are, Jefferson,
Part of natural glory,
Unimportant in your important
Position.
You are the mountain now,
Carved there to be above the world
And as close to heaven as a man can be,
Yet the mountain is your master
And your destiny carved by the
Wind and rain, in front of whom
You will take your final breath:
No man's face is immortal.
His soul though may live on,
If he has given enough to the
Land.
Where will yours reside, Thomas?

Not in these hills, for you were just
Carved here.
Not in Washington D.C., for you were just
Built there.
Nobody asked you.
Nobody offered you the timeshare brochures
for those places and forced you
To buy. Would you have done?
I think not, for in the
Purple mountains and golden leafy countryside of
Virginia there stands a little hill
(where your house is)
Where you were and
Are.
Everything's big on America;
Everything is free and open
Like these hills, these plains,
Your majestic monument (free entry)
Where the cherry trees blossom
And one can hire a pedal boat
For just seven dollars an hour in the
Summer (timeshare again).
If all is so big though, why does
All the power lie in Monticello,
'little hill', and why is it
More free here in the quiet countryside
Than being trapped as part of a mountain
In South Dakota until your soul can escape
Or being enclosed in a circular architectural
Structure (almost Roman) and floodlit
Until 12 a.m. every night?
We are only trying to honour you, yet
Let the honouring be done quietly,
Without visitors' centres, restrooms and
Japanese tourists.
Now rest, Thomas;
Even though you are not in these hills
Which are not black.

Sunrise at Monument Valley, 19.8.93

In the beginning
Like a gardener's weathered hand
The rock stands
Solid, dark;
Then like Frankenstein's creature
Is infused with light,
With life,
As slowly the dense, blue,
Seemingly-impenetrable clouds
Melt away to
Celestial yellow.
Gently,
As water,
The magic spreads,
Reaches the right hand
Joined in a perfect line
As delicate as spun thread.
As I watch
I can see the light growing
On the left side of the horizon
And behind the heavy cliff
To where I may only imagine,
As I must imagine each separate moment
And spreading of the sun's anticipation
Of what is to come:
My picture, like that of a camera,
Is limited-
Yet a privilege so rare.

A view of the Grand Canyon

A bug buzzing in my hair
buzz buzz buzz
Can do whatever he wants
And I am numb,

Void of power:
For here
Let him reign.
As the peak of my cap
Frames the window of the world
Below me I
remember that I am not watching
Through this window
(take your time)
but melted into a rock,
as much a part of the canyon
as the age-old rocks
at the bottom
Where no man can see.
These rocks are all-knowing,
Have seen the secrets of the world twice-over
(shut up)
Yet are silent, telling nothing to
those who intrude.
Like a book though they can be read,
If you only stop staring at the cover
And open the pages.
Below me, two figures,
A monument to those first explorers;
The first almost a fading shadow
reflected on the rock in front of him, yet
his follower stands straight,
hat stiff and uncreased, one foot
stepped forward, one knee bent.
We are the second explorer,
head turned so slightly to the left in
ignorance of the presence of his leader
and the quiet stare of the rocks.
Each person learns for himself
But rarely do we join in wisdom:
One for one and all for one.
Now I move on,
In search of the silent sunlight.

Another view of the Grand Canyon

Fluff your hair up
Stick your bottom out
Cheese
Here's a picture at (the Grand Canyon)
Do I look beautiful enough?
Yap Yap
Ooh, here comes the video camera,
Watch it, watch it-
Excuse me, you're in the way!
James, don't run near the edge please,
Stay inside the barrier
And you all stay inside the barrier too
You bloody Italians;
Moods go up and down
And now I'm being selfish,
But why can't they just be quiet?

O, to be a Plane

O, to be a plane,
Where the sky is blue
And it's only me and you;
We are way up in the air
And it doesn't matter when or where,
As long as we are free
And it's only you and me
Singing 'O! To be a Plane!'

The Random Years

Ode to Pastarotti

On the stage, black beard and hair,
Commanding presence, artiste rare;
You possess what Carreras lacks-

Three hundred pounds, to be exact.

Stately globe in metrical proportion,
Perfect round without distortion;
From front or side, from box or stalls
Your curvature the same to all.

The crowd awaits, their hearts palpating,
Nervously anticipating-
A flattened sharp, a sharpened flat?
No, they fear far worse than that:

With that immense circumference,
Your fastenings are surely tense;
Your cummerbund and that bowtie,
Will they hold, or burst tonight?

Yet this is where your genius lies:
In rounded stomach, in well-stocked thighs;
Bigger than your average Yeti,
Your learned mentor is spaghetti!

In practice you do not believe,
Away with hours of recitative,
It's on with the hob and off with the polonaise,
Instead of aria, a plate of Bolognese.

Your scores composed of fine linguine,
Ragu sauce, raviolini;
With a spoonful of hot pesto,
Arpeggios are pushed to *presto*;

Three sunflower seeds a day alone,
Claims Kiri, amends a diva's tone;
Ah no, says Pav, it's parpardelle
That I need for voice and belly.

But wait, a hush, the baton raised,
Your chest filled out, eyes upward gaze,
Shattering silence, woodwind plays,

And sweet your voice, *cantabile*:

OOOoooooO- *

Pas-ta-

Rot-ti,

That's me, that's me;

Tagliatelle,

And fusilli,

Are the components

Of sonorities,

Alone can make a-

Celeb-rity!

*To the melody of 'O Solo Mio'

The Cancer Years

'Twas the night before Chemo Crash

'Twas the night before Chemo Crash,
And all through the house
Not a creature was stirring
Except a deranged middle-aged woman on steroids
Who was polishing vases,
Yes, vases,
For she had polished everything else already,
Had dusted and polished and tidied for hours,
From dusk to nightfall and the still of the dark.
Earlier, a myriad of presents she had wrapped,
Adorning each with a tiny gift tag (well, until they ran out)
Then placing in a pile of ever-increasing girth,
Looking at them, satisfied, feeling her worth.
She now sat on the carpet,

That in itself a wonder,
Marvelling at the mirage's midnight power
To bend her, to stretch her, to take away pain
Just for a moment, to make her feel normal again.
The front door creaked open and who should appear,
But a smiling husband full of Christmas party cheer,
'What are you doing still up?' he cries, but wonder glistens in his eyes.
'I'm dusting, that's what I'm doing, I'm dusting my dear,
Because I can, and because I'm here.'
And they spun and they spun in the light of the moon,
Laughing and dancing to their very own tune.

December 2023

Node to Chemo Crash

O Chemo Crash,
You and I cannot be on good terms here.
You are a robber, a swindler,
A bigger cheat than a ten year-old playing cards;
You greedily grab time, conversation,
Experiences, food, love:
And rip them up before the victim's eyes.
You merge morning into night, breakfast to dinner,
You gleefully chase my friends the Steroids away,
Forcing my husband to inflict THE SAME GREEN SMOOTHIE on me all day.
Revelling in your triumph, your dominion
Over senses and movement, crushing smiles
And bringing tears.
Or that's what you think.
Well I have news for you.
There's a new kid in town and he's hurtling through my veins like a cowboy on
horseback,
Spinning his lasso with shouts of war.
Meet Vit C IV- he's coming for you,
And I don't like your chances.

December 2023

To My Hair

Dear Hair,

I'm sorry.

I apologise for all the times I have spoken against you,

Which, let's face it, is most of the time.

To be fair you haven't made it easy:

You have always been thin, breakable,

Refusing to grow past my shoulders

Like a stubborn child,

Even though I have willed you,

Begged you.

When I was eight, the class teacher was talking us through arrangements for a special event,

I don't know what, maybe a concert.

I put my hand up and asked if we would be allowed to wear our hair up for it.

Before the teacher could reply, a boy shouted out, laughing: 'You don't have enough hair to put up!'

Thus began our rocky relationship.

In my teenage years and early adulthood

You thought it would be amusing to make me look

Like a hippy, stubbornly refusing to part anywhere except the middle (you still do),

Your lank locks sitting close to my scalp

And pouring down my back like an oil spill,

Clinging to my flesh.

As I approached middle age, you changed tactic,

Shape-shifting into something resembling

The wire wool that Steve keeps in his tool store:

Dry, frizzy- and to add insult to injury

You began to sneak in strands of grey,

Subtly at first, and then you were having too much fun and could not resist

Polluting my entire nearly-blond locks

With grey streaks

Like a bad artist's work.

And then a surprise:

Somehow you befriended the last chemo,
Using its power to transform yourself into a fuller shape with gentle curls,
Making me happy just for once-
Or maybe there was evil underlying intent,
Maybe you knew your days were numbered,
And decided to taunt me with what might have been
So you could go out
In a blaze of glory,
Your final vicious act.
But I'm still sorry.
For I have realised that there is much about you
That I cherish.
You cover my head, you are warm.
I like being warm.
You fly behind me in the wind
When I am riding my bike
Or jumping on the trampoline.
But most of all, you are mine.
Mine since a baby, constantly growing and renewing
However slowly.
And now we are to be parted,
I may never see you again
Or if I do
You won't be the same.
Your fledgling stubble will be entirely grey, wiry,
I will yearn for your honey-coloured blanket
Soft against my neck.
But I will fight back.
I will turn this around
Into something good,
Something better.
I will choose the hair I always wanted,
It will be longer than you ever managed to grow,
Shinier, bouncier, blonder.
It will be awesome.
But it won't be mine.

March 2024

Scan Results

At that moment

When you walk into that room

You are not the adventurer, climbing, running, swimming, riding on the crest of a wave.

You are not the dreamer, the seeker of joy, the one who finds beauty in everything.

You are not your abilities, your achievements, your vocation.

You are not the music in your head or the voice of song.

You are not the words of love you say to your family.

You are not the laughter that dissipates tears.

You are not the hopes for your children, the concerns for your parents, the bond with your siblings.

You are not your home, your surroundings, your community.

You are not you.

Instead, you are a document, a file.

You are a map

Marking the boundaries of enemy lines. Will they have advanced or retreated?

You are numbers. Quantities. Measurements.

You are statistics.

You are probability.

Suddenly he speaks, the one with the knowledge,

And you listen, vulnerable, at his mercy.

'It's good news again'.

Faces break into smiles, pulses slow,

Waves of joy, relief and thankfulness

Swirl and dance through minds and hearts.

You are not a fact.

You are not predictable.

You are unique.

You are you.

September 2024

On the 24th Cycle of Chemo

On the 24th cycle of chemo,
My doctors gave to me:
A big hit of steroids,
A bag of Avastin,
Irinotecan,
Oxaliplatin,

5 FU!

Then at home I took
More steroids,
Several Zopiclone
And a cannabis supposit-or-y!

December 2024